United Nations A/72/PV.99

General Assembly

Official Records

Seventy-second session

99th plenary meeting
Monday, 25 June 2018, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Lajčák ..... (Slovakia)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 132 (*continued*)

The responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity

Report of the Secretary-General (A/72/884)

The President: We are here to talk about the responsibility to protect, and for the first time in nearly a decade, we are doing it through a formal debate. As we know, the responsibility to protect is complex. The concept was born in 2005, and it has evolved and developed a great deal since then. There are three elements that I want to highlight in particular today.

First, I will address people. We know what kind of crimes and violations are covered by the responsibility to protect, namely, genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Those are all legal terms and definitions. But we cannot forget that behind them are real people — people who have been killed, who have been stripped of their humanity and who have seen things that no one should have to see. Survivors have told their harrowing stories in this very Hall. I listened to many when I travelled to Rwanda in May. I heard about how genocide ripped societies apart and about the trauma and pain, which will never fully disappear. Yes, we are here to discuss the responsibility to protect. It is rooted in international law and in the Charter of the United Nations. But what we are really talking about is people and the responsibility that Governments and the international community have to them and to humankind.

Secondly, I would like to speak about prevention. I believe that it is the core of the responsibility to protect, to do everything we can to avoid reaching the point where humanity is lost. But I want to be frank, prevention is hard work. It does not always make the headlines. It often takes place behind the scenes, over a long period of time, and it requires a real investment in terms of both time and money. It means making institutions stronger and more capable of protecting the people they serve, providing technical assistance to countries that need to build their early-warning systems, lending humanitarian support and protection for the most vulnerable people, supporting grass-roots groups, including women's networks, which can flag voting patterns of discrimination, hate speech or intolerance, promoting the rule of law and human rights, ensuring accountability for violations of humanitarian law and intensifying diplomatic efforts if things start to go downhill. As I said, all of that is hard work, but it is worth it. Prevention can save people from experiencing the horrors of atrocity crimes and, more pragmatically, it can save money. Let us use the same example of Rwanda. A recent World Bank and United Nations study states that every dollar invested there in preventing the recurrence of violence has saved $16 over the past two decades.

Thirdly, with respect to the General Assembly, the concept of the responsibility to protect was born here. This organ held a high-level plenary meeting (see A/60/PV.2 to A/60/PV.8).on the responsibility to

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protect during its sixtieth session. As members of the Assembly know, that led to the universal adoption of the concept at the 2005 World Summit, and formally in resolution 63/308 four years later, in 2009. Although eight informal dialogues have been held, today is the first formal meeting on the responsibility to protect since then. I therefore think that this is a good time to remind ourselves of the weight on our shoulders. The Assembly is the most representative organ of the United Nations. It gives every Member State a seat and a platform. Its main job is to take the Organization forward and to work towards the values outlined in its Charter. That is why it has been the birthplace of the most ambitious frameworks the world has seen, and many of them are related to our discussion today — for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Convention.

I would like to point out the link between the responsibility to protect and the United Nations Charter. It is a very clear one. All action under the responsibility to protect must take place within the parameters of the Charter, including the principle of State sovereignty. But more than that, we have all committed, through the first line of the Charter, to save future generations from the scourge of war, and the responsibility to protect is based on that very objective. I therefore believe we have a serious job today. It does not mean that we all have to agree. We can debate, have different opinions and offer our own views; but let us not forget that this Organization was born from horror. Every State Member of the United Nations has made a commitment to confining such horrors to history, and the responsibility to protect can help us to meet that commitment. It therefore deserves our full attention today.

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres.

The Secretary-General: I welcome this formal debate of the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect — the first, as the President said, since 2009. This discussion is more critical today than ever as we strive together to protect people from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Global leaders unanimously endorsed the responsibility to protect at the 2005 World Summit. Following genocides a decade before, in Rwanda and Srebrenica, and at a time of profound global divisions, that was a breakthrough. The imperative was clear: do more to protect people and do so as a united international community.

Yet today there is still fear that the principle could be used to take collective action for purposes other than those agreed on in the World Summit Outcome. There are also concerns about possible double standards and the selective use of the principle in the past. That is why open and frank exchanges such as this are necessary to dispel misconceptions and mistrust. We have to forge mutual understanding and establish stronger support for the responsibility to protect as a key tool of protection and prevention.

Let us remember that the primary responsibility for protecting people rests with States. As the World Summit Outcome document states,

> "Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations ... This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement ... We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it." (*resolution 60/1, para. 138*)

Indeed, protecting its people is a fundamental part of a State's exercise of its national sovereignty.

In that spirit, my latest report on the responsibility to protect (A/72/884) proposes various steps that States can take to strengthen their capacities, including conducting national risk assessments and designing policies to address any vulnerabilities. Expanding the participation of civil society is also critical to enhancing early warning and ensuring the effectiveness of national human rights institutions and ombudspersons.

I also encourage Member States to ratify and domesticate instruments of international law that relate to the prohibition and prevention of the crimes and violations referred to in the Summit Outcome. As of today, 45 Member States have still not ratified the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. In a year when we mark the Convention's seventieth anniversary, achieving universal ratification would send a welcome signal of resolve.

Let us also recall that the international community has a responsibility to support States in fulfilling that task. Again, let us listen to the words of the World Summit Outcome:

> "The international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with Chapters VI and VIII of the Charter, to help to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity." (*ibid., para. 139*)

Regional organizations have a role to play in helping Governments address the risks and precursors of atrocity crimes. Networks of States can also be valuable in developing partnerships, mechanisms and good practices. In the past month, approximately one third of the members of the Assembly met twice to advance such efforts: first in Kampala, together with civil society organizations, under the umbrella of the Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes; and again in Helsinki, for the annual meeting of the Global Network of the Responsibility to Protect Focal Points

The United Nations will continue to support Member States, especially those that might be facing fragility and stress, in strengthening institutions, defending human rights and fortifying the cohesion of society. That is an essential part of my prevention agenda. The Offices of my Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect provide vital support in that regard.

Only when peaceful means are inadequate and national authorities are manifestly failing to protect their populations can there be a responsibility for collective action. But let us be clear here too: the responsibility to protect does not create a new mechanism for intervention or coercion. The Summit Outcome stipulates that any such action is to be carried out

> "through the Security Council, in accordance with the Charter, including Chapter VII, on a case-by-case basis" (*supra.*).

It is clear that today's discussion takes place against a backdrop of atrocity crimes being committed at a scale and ferocity not seen in years, with little regard for international human rights and humanitarian law. We are witnessing deliberate attacks against civilian and non-military infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools, leading to large-scale civilian casualties. We are seeing rampant sexual violence, the denial of life-saving aid and the widespread and systematic targeting of specific ethnic groups that could amount to acts of genocide. None of those crimes is inevitable or a by-product of conflict. All atrocity crimes are preventable and can never be justified. That was the reason for my official letter to the Security Council last September on the plight of the Rohingya in Myanmar (S/2017/753). It is important to build the consensus needed to mount desperately needed responses to ease suffering and end violence. Our overarching challenge is to uphold the principle while preventing its misuse. That means acting promptly, preventively and diplomatically before situations escalate and spiral out of control.

A positive example was set by the international community when it decided to act in the Central African Republic when there was a high risk of a genocidal killing spree. An International Commission of Inquiry established by the Security Council later concluded that timely action by the African Union, the United Nations peacekeeping operation and French peacekeeping forces amid ongoing fighting prevented an even greater explosion of violence.

The World Summit Outcome stresses the need for the General Assembly to continue its consideration of the responsibility to protect, and I strongly encourage it to do so. We must support the efforts of intergovernmental bodies to prevent atrocity crimes, including by making better use of the tools at the disposal of the Security Council, such as accountability mechanisms. At this time of extreme challenges, we must not abandon the responsibility to protect or leave it in a state of suspended animation, finely articulated in words but breached time and again in practice. Lofty principles mean little if they cannot be applied when they matter most. The credibility of the international community and, above all, the lives of millions rest on us.

The President: I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar): I have the honour to deliver this statement on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, which consists of 50 Member States and the European Union and is co-chaired this year by Italy and the State of Qatar.

We would like to thank the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General for their statements, and Australia and Ghana for their leadership in including the responsibility to protect on the agenda of this session of the General Assembly. We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his report entitled "Responsibility to protect: from early warning to early action" (A/72/884). We commend his prioritization of

early warning and early action to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and for recognizing that the responsibility to protect is a key element of that important agenda. We welcome the report's recommendations and encourage Member States to implement them.

The commitment made by all States Members of the United Nations to the responsibility to protect at the World Summit in 2005 was historic. The Group of Friends reaffirms its strong commitment to paragraphs 138, 139 and 140 of the World Summit Outcome (resolution 60/1) and the three pillars of the responsibility to protect.

Today marks the first formal debate of the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect since 2009. The inclusion of the responsibility to protect on the Assembly's formal agenda reflects the will of the wider United Nations membership regarding the prevention of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. We urge the United Nations membership to consider the merits of including the item permanently on the formal agenda of the General Assembly. Continued dialogue in the Assembly will promote the building of consensus on what the international community can do to prevent such heinous crimes.

The acceptance of the responsibility to protect through the World Summit Outcome remains a key commitment of the international community to protect populations that face the threat of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and ethnic cleansing. At this time, the Group would like to reiterate its common understanding that the responsibility to protect reinforces, rather than undermines, State sovereignty. As the Secretary-General underlined in the presentation of his priorities to the General Assembly earlier this year, it is necessary to overcome the false contradiction between human rights and national sovereignty. Human rights and national sovereignty go hand in hand. The achievement of human rights strengthens States and societies, thereby reinforcing sovereignty. States with effective, accountable institutions are among the best defenders of human rights.

Since 2005, considerable progress has been made by the United Nations, Member States and other stakeholders, including civil society, in operationalizing our commitment to the responsibility to protect at the national, regional and international levels. International and national actors have been successful in creating frameworks for identifying risks, developing early-warning mechanisms, articulating inhibitors of atrocity crimes and creating new institutional mechanisms. Today's formal debate gives States an important opportunity to share national experiences, best practices and effective strategies for preventing atrocities.

Over the past decade, we have seen the creation and expansion of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect in both New York and Geneva, the establishment and growth of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, and the inclusion of the responsibility to protect in at least 69 Security Council resolutions, including in the mandates of a number of United Nations peace operations and in resolutions of the Human Rights Council. Important initiatives, such as the code of conduct regarding Security Council action against genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and Human Rights Up Front have supported efforts to prevent atrocity crimes and continue to serve as important tools for mainstreaming atrocity prevention and strengthening prevention capacities.

The prevention of atrocities is at the core of each of the three pillars of the responsibility to protect. Member States should better utilize the entire United Nations system to effectively prevent and respond to their perpetration. As the 2018 report of the Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect suggests, we should make a concerted effort to continue to report on progress towards the implementation of the responsibility to protect and bring situations of imminent risk of atrocity crimes to the attention of the General Assembly, the Security Council and th Human Rights Council, as needed. For example, the Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is well-placed to support preventive efforts. We encourage Member States to better utilize the UPR processes as a preventive mechanism.

This year we mark the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was created in response to violent conflict in order to prevent future violent conflicts. In addition to embodying the international community's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights for all individuals around the world, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the treaties that derive from it are, in the words of the Secretary General, the best prevention tool we have.

The General Assembly should also play a more active role in supporting States in their efforts to carry out their primary responsibility to protect their populations. The Security Council should consider situations where there is potential for mass atrocities at the earliest possible stage, including through utilizing working methods such as situational awareness briefings and Arria Formula meetings.

We also strongly emphasize the role of women in the prevention of atrocity crimes, as they are crucial for early warning and peacebuilding, promoting cooperation and capacity-building and creating more cohesive and inclusive societies. We should take concrete steps to end all forms of discrimination on the basis of gender and to empower women as agents of atrocity prevention, including by ensuring that all girls have equal access to quality education.

As recognized in the Secretary-General's report, we need to mobilize all the resources at our disposal and broaden the constituency of actors engaged in atrocity prevention. In that respect, we specifically welcome recent efforts by the General Assembly and the Security Council to recognize and promote the participation of youth in conflict prevention and resolution.

Accountability for the perpetrators of atrocity crimes is among the most effective ways of preventing recurrence. States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute international crimes committed within their jurisdiction, and national accountability efforts should be encouraged and supported, including by strengthening judicial cooperation among States.

We urge States to comply with their international legal obligations and thoroughly investigate and prosecute persons responsible for genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or other serious violations of international law, as well as to strengthen judicial cooperation with other States for that purpose. International investigative mechanisms, including fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry, can support efforts to promote accountability and bring situations of concern to the attention of States. Additionally, international courts and hybrid tribunals, including the International Criminal Court, provide complementary avenues in appropriate circumstances to enable accountability.

We take this opportunity to reaffirm our support for the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, and we encourage the Secretary-General to appoint a Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. The Special Adviser and the Joint Office have a key role in assisting Member States in the operationalization of the responsibility to protect.

We reiterate the significance of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as an effective international instrument for the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide. To mark the seventieth anniversary of the adoption of the Genocide Convention on 9 December, the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide launched an appeal for its universal ratification, which is supported by the Secretary-General. We strongly encourage States that have not yet ratified or acceded to the Convention to consider doing so as a matter of high priority and to ensure its implementation at the national level. Ratifying and complying with the Convention is an affirmation of the commitment to "never again".

We recognize the important role national and international civil society can play in supporting the further advancement and implementation of the responsibility to protect. In particular, we would like to thank the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect for its invaluable work as the secretariat of the Group of Friends, both in New York and Geneva.

At a time when more than 68.5 million people are displaced as a result of armed conflict, atrocities and persecution worldwide, we hope that during this debate we can collectively identify implementable strategies that can effectively prevent atrocities and protect populations around the world from atrocities.

The President: I now give the floor to the observer of the European Union.

Ms. Adamson (European Union): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and its member States. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

The European Union welcomes the inclusion of today's debate on the responsibility to protect on the formal agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. It is very apposite to be discussing our responsibility at a moment when there are allegations of mass atrocities being committed in various corners of the globe.

The European Union, like the United Nations, was born after the horrors of the Second World War, in a spirit of "never again". The responsibility to protect is at the core of our primary goal, which is to enable our populations to live in peace and security. When we fail in our responsibility to protect, we fail our very reason for being here.

It is a well-established principle that prevention is far more effective than reaction, and that is where the European Union concentrates the implementation of its responsibility to protect. Our efforts, and those of the international community, must now focus on making prevention more effective. In that context, we support the Secretary-General's broad focus on prevention, which fully resonates with the European approach to security, as envisaged in the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. In the wider agenda of preventing conflict and sustaining peace, atrocity prevention must become central. The ongoing reform of the United Nations should enhance synergies, capacities and accountability across the system to make it fit to address the multisectoral challenges of preventing atrocities.

In that context, the European Union welcomes the focus of this year's report of the Secretary-General (A/72/884), entitled "Responsibility to protect: from early warning to early action". Improving our early-warning capacity and, based on our assessments, moving quickly to early action is the key to the effective prevention of crimes against humanity, war crimes, genocide and ethnic cleansing. The European Union and its member States will take all the relevant recommendations of the report under consideration to inform our policies and actions.

The European Union particularly welcomes the threefold strategy for strengthening early action proposed by the Secretary-General in his report. We will continue strengthening our capacity to prevent atrocities and supporting partner countries in strengthening their own. Through a multidimensional approach, using all available policies and instruments, the responsibility to protect has been made an integral part of the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. Our conflict early-warning system includes the risk of mass atrocities taken into account in European Union policy considerations. Atrocity prevention has been integrated into our field missions and operations working for the protection of civilians, as well as into capacity-building programmes guided by the new European Consensus on Development. We are preparing a dedicated, evidence-based toolkit on atrocity prevention to provide the staff of our diplomatic, military and civilian missions with hands-on knowledge of how they can assess the risks of atrocity prevention and what they can do to support it.

In our experience, as stressed in the Secretary-General's report, regional organizations can have an added value in atrocity prevention, thanks to their specific early-warning mechanisms, conflict prevention and resolution capacities and potential for channelling assessments, good practices and lessons learned. The European Union encourages relevant regional organizations to embed the principles of the responsibility to protect in their practice and priorities, and to take appropriate action to help prevent atrocity crimes. Appointing a focal point on the responsibility to protect, as the European Union has done, would be a useful and necessary step for regional organizations to raise awareness about the principle internally and among their membership, with a view to consolidating and enhancing atrocity-prevention activities. The European Union stands ready to share its experience with other regional actors.

Guidance, coordination and support from the United Nations to its Member States are crucial in preventing atrocities. The EU will continue to support the Secretary-General's Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect in their efforts to mainstream the prevention of atrocities across the United Nations.

We would like to thank Mr. Ivan Šimonović , former Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect, for his work in that area. Now that his mandate has ended, we welcome the Secretary-General's intention to quickly appoint a new Special Adviser. In our view, the next Special Adviser should preferably have relevant experience in making atrocity prevention operational. Once someone is appointed, we encourage the Secretary-General to ensure that he or she has access to all the information and decision-making processes necessary to inform and support assessments and actions regarding the responsibility to protect.

As the Secretary-General stresses in his threefold strategy, we must continue promoting accountability for atrocity prevention. The European Union and its member States remain committed to efforts to end impunity for mass atrocities at the national and international levels.

States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdictions, while international courts and hybrid tribunals can play an important role where States are unwilling or unable to do so genuinely. We actively promote the universality of the Rome Statute and foster capacities for accountability and reconciliation, which are key elements for non-recurrence, through our support for the International Criminal Court.

Within the United Nations system, the Security Council should use all available tools in the exercise of its responsibility to protect populations from mass atrocities. The General Assembly, the Human Rights Council and human rights treaty bodies and mechanisms, as well as the Security Council, must also be mobilized in preventing those atrocities. The Secretary-General's Human Rights Up Front initiative works as an enabler of enhancing system-wide capacity in the United Nations to prevent mass violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

The EU wholeheartedly endorses the third dimension of the Secretary-General's proposed strategy for early action through expanding civilian action for atrocity prevention. We have been encouraging dialogue among a wide spectrum of national and international civil society actors, and we have been supporting their efforts in conflict and atrocity prevention, mediation and peacebuilding. We support the role that women and youth can play in de-escalating tensions and building peace in their communities. We acknowledge the importance of engaging religious leaders and faith-based actors in the fight against discrimination of minorities, hate speech and other risk factors for mass atrocities.

The EU expects a rich and fruitful debate today. We encourage States to voice their support for the principle of the responsibility to protect and, outside this Hall, to devise and exchange views on ways to strengthen preventive capacities. In view of the challenges that the world is facing today, we would welcome the inclusion of the responsibility to protect as a formal item on the agenda of the General Assembly at its coming sessions.

From the outset, the EU has been a staunch supporter of the principle of the responsibility to protect. In partnership with other States and with regional and international organizations, in particular the United Nations, we will continue working to make prevention of mass atrocities effective, thereby responding to our responsibility to protect.

Mr. Tito (Kiribati): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Pacific Islands Forum members represented at the United Nations, namely, Australia, Fiji, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu and my own country, Kiribati.

The Forum members would like to thank the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly for their statements. We also commend the Secretary-General for his report (A/72/884) and its focus on the importance of early warning and early action in response to the risk of mass atrocities.

We agree with the Secretary-General that the implementation of the principle of the responsibility to protect principle, as set out in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome, must be our collective focus. Our task is not to renegotiate or reinterpret the commitment our leaders made in 2005 but to implement it.

We welcome the debate in the General Assembly today. Our hope is that this can be part of an ongoing dialogue in the Assembly about how we can better protect populations from mass atrocities, including by sharing experiences, perspectives and lessons learned to help improve practice internationally, regionally and domestically. We agree with the Secretary-General that implementing the responsibility to protect and prioritizing prevention in the United Nations system are interlinked and complementary. As the Secretary-General's report highlights, preventive capacities should be cultivated at all levels so that early warning also means early action.

The Pacific Islands Forum members believe that early dialogue, partnership and action, particularly at the regional level, are critical to delivering on our responsibility to protect. The importance of early warning and early action was recognized and enshrined by Forum leaders in a declaration in Biketawa, Kiribati, at the beginning of this century. That important document recognizes the vulnerability of all Forum members to civil unrest and other threats to our population's security. The declaration articulates a common commitment to resolving conflict through regional cooperation.

The declaration has served as the springboard for a number of regional assistance missions. That includes the highly successful Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI), which commenced in 2003 and concluded last year. The Mission was a partnership among the people and the Government of Solomon Islands and 15 contributing members from the Pacific region. The Mission's mandate was to help lay the foundations for long-term stability and prosperity in Solomon Islands, including by restoring civil order, restoring the machinery of Government and helping rebuild the economy.

The consent of Solomon Islands and its partnership were prerequisites for the Mission, as well as essential elements in its success. RAMSI's regional identity was its core underlying strength. Every Pacific Island Forum country participated in RAMSI, which benefited from the diverse cultures and experiences of its contributing members. Since 2003, thousands of police, military and civilian personnel from across the region served with RAMSI, working side by side with Solomon Islanders. Another critical reason for RAMSI's success is that assistance was requested and provided in the early stages of unrest, lawlessness and violence. The warning signs were present and action was taken. That is an example of the second pillar of the responsibility to protect in action.

Pacific Islands Forum leaders have committed to negotiate an updated Biketawa-plus declaration, to guide regional responses to emerging security challenges. At the heart of that commitment is a recognition that no one country can meet the security challenges we face alone.

Mr. Mažeiks (Latvia): I have the honour to speak on behalf of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. We also align ourselves with the statement delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union.

We strongly support holding a formal General Assembly debate on the responsibility to protect, and we are glad that this formal debate is taking place today after nine years of informal discussions. The implementation of the responsibility to protect is an important topic that deserves to be a standing item on the General Assembly's agenda.

We thank the Secretary-General for his annual report, which focuses on options to further improve early warning and strengthen early action. The report reminds us that the international community continues to fall short in preventing atrocity crimes and protecting vulnerable populations. We fully agree with the Secretary-General in his summary that

> "[i]t costs far more to pick up the pieces after crisis than it does to prevent crisis." (*A/72/884, p.1*)

With the help of available prevention tools, we must better translate early-warning signs into timely preventive action to avoid repeating the tragic mistakes of the past. Massive failures in the responsibility to protect are particularly glaring today as we mark the seventieth anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

It is the primary responsibility of individual States to protect all populations within their territory from mass atrocity crimes. The timely identification of risks and detection of early-warning signs of atrocity crimes can help save lives through action. We note from the report that some Member States and multilateral organizations have strengthened those capacities over the past few years. It is crucial to continue such preventive efforts, including by developing and integrating early warning into national policies and addressing the root causes of risks. With strong national institutions, transparent and accountable political leadership and respect for the rule of law, efforts to prevent atrocity crimes can be more effective. The protection of human rights is crucial to the prevention of conflicts. Furthermore, systematic human rights violations are often important warning signs of potential crises. In that regard, regional and international human rights mechanisms and their recommendations can provide useful support to Member States. Civil society, the media and journalists can also positively contribute to developing early-warning and response systems by raising public awareness about human rights violations and crimes against humanity.

Timely action is a crucial component of the responsibility to protect concept. We welcome the inclusion of lessons learned in the report, as they provide useful guidance on factors that could affect effective early action. We also agree that actions taken jointly by local, national, regional and global actors can be more effective. Too often, however, States are not willing or able to prevent or respond to mass atrocities. It then is the international community's duty to live up to its responsibility to protect. The United Nations system has a particular role to play in advancing and operationalizing the concept of the responsibility to protect, including through the protection of civilians

in peacekeeping operations. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the previous Special Advisers on the Responsibility to Protect for their hard work and commitment, and we hope that the new Adviser will be appointed soon.

The Security Council has a special responsibility to take timely and decisive action to prevent the outbreak of brutality against innocent people. Unfortunately, on too many occasions, the right of the veto has been abused and has left the Council paralysed. We therefore support the proposal to voluntarily limit the use of the veto at the Security Council in situations involving mass atrocity crimes and in accordance with the code of conduct requiring the members of the Council not to vote against any action intended to stop or prevent mass atrocity crimes.

We encourage the Secretary-General to continue his good offices in bringing situations involving the imminent risk of atrocity crimes to the attention of the relevant regional and United Nations bodies, including the Security Council. We emphasize the need to ensure accountability for mass atrocity crimes. We urge States to thoroughly investigate and prosecute people responsible for the most serious crimes. Our countries will continue to support the work of the International Criminal Court (ICC), which is essential to operationalizing the concept of the responsibility to protect. Referrals to the ICC by the Security Council are necessary when there is evidence that atrocity crimes have been committed with impunity.

Exactly 100 years ago, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania chose their path to building open, democratic and inclusive societies based on cohesion, multilateralism, equality, inclusion and the rule of law. The path has not always been easy, and we treasure what we have achieved. Today we remain committed to the implementation of the responsibility to protect. We call on all United Nations States Members to uphold that important political commitment. We all must do what we can to protect civilian populations from the threat of atrocity crimes.

Ms. Bird (Australia): Australia was pleased to partner with Ghana to propose this important debate, the first General Assembly debate on the responsibility to protect in this decade. In 2005, the world's leaders declared that we must never again react with indifference in the face of mass atrocity crimes. Leaders agreed on the three pillars of the responsibility to protect as the guiding principles for preventing and responding to such crimes. Former Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon aptly described the responsibility to protect as narrow but deep. It is narrow, because it focuses on atrocity crimes — genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity; and deep, as its implementation is necessarily multidimensional, while requiring action at the national, regional and international levels. Although the collective commitment to the principle of the responsibility to protect is strong, there remains a significant gap between it and the daily reality for many populations across the world. The implementation of the responsibility to protect must be our focus.

Australia thanks the Secretary-General for his insightful remarks today and his report (A/72/884) on the responsibility to protect, which includes concrete and sound recommendations for its implementation. We agree with him that the implementation of the responsibility to protect is an essential part of the pivot to prevention in the United Nations system. Effective prevention requires the participation of society as a whole, from civil society to religious and community leaders. It requires action by States at the domestic, regional and international levels. We must do better at identifying the early-warning signs of mass violence and, critically, summon the political will for early action. In Australia's view, action at the regional level is essential for the meaningful implementation of the responsibility to protect.

In the Pacific region, the members of the Pacific Islands Forum, including Australia, agreed to the Biketawa declaration 18 years ago in Kiribati. That important document recognizes the vulnerability of all members to civil unrest and other threats to their populations' security. It articulates a common commitment to resolving conflict through regional cooperation. The declaration has served as the springboard for regional assistance missions that have successfully restored law and order, rebuilt national institutions and supported economic growth. The consent of, and partnership with, receiving States were the prerequisite to those missions and critical to their success, an example of the second pillar of the responsibility to protect in action. After all, no one country alone can meet the security challenges we face.

The horrors of the Second World War were fresh in the minds of the drafters of the Charter of the United Nations. The Charter they created endows the Security Council with unique powers. The use of those powers

to protect populations from mass atrocities was central to the drafters' vision for the Organization. That is why we joined 113 others in supporting the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct, a commitment to refraining from vetoing Security Council action in cases of mass atrocity. We also encourage all States, but especially Security Council members, to join Australia and the 95 other Member States that support France and Mexico's initiative on veto restraint.

The Secretary-General's report highlights the diversity of tools that must necessarily be in the responsibility-to-protect toolkit. We agree that existing human rights mechanisms, such as the Universal Periodic Review process, play an important role in advancing the prevention of mass atrocities. Strengthening accountability for atrocity crimes is another important way that we can close the implementation gap. Australia firmly believes that holding to account those responsible for serious international crimes, whether at the domestic or international level, is critical for inclusive and sustainable peace. Where perpetrators commit atrocities with impunity and where justice fails victims, the seeds of future mass violence are sown.

Our leaders saw a leading role for the General Assembly in discussing the implementation of the responsibility to protect. While the Security Council and the Human Rights Council have invoked the responsibility to protect in their discussions and actions, the Assembly has remained mute. Australia believes that the Assembly is an essential forum for inclusive, comprehensive and regular discussions on how we can better implement our common commitment to prevent mass atrocities. We look forward to the dialogue today on the responsibility to protect and its implementation.

Mrs. Pobee (Ghana): I join previous speakers in thanking the Secretary-General for his excellent report on the responsibility to protect (A/72/884). We are encouraged by the report's focus on early warning and the means of strengthening early action through a threefold strategy and approach to the implementation of the responsibility to protect.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier by the Permanent Representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

I would like to recall that Ghana and Australia called for the inclusion of this subject on the agenda of the General Assembly and for the formalization of our debate on this important principle by reason of our conviction that sincere and transparent dialogue, devoid of dramatization, would allow for building consensus on the responsibility to protect.

At the outset, I want to reiterate Ghana's view that the principle of the responsibility to protect remains relevant, both as an expression of political commitment and as a blueprint for action to prevent and end genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. We support the framework for the implementation of the responsibility to protect based on the three equal and mutually reinforcing pillars of the principle, namely the primary obligation of States to protect their peoples, the collective responsibility of the international community in those efforts, and strategies to ensure the timely and decisive collective responses necessary to effectively meet the principle's laudable objectives, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Ghana believes that the implementation of the responsibility to protect through enhanced national, regional and global collaboration on effective prevention strategies would contribute to prioritizing the Organization's prevention agenda and strengthen accountability for atrocity crimes. We endorse the position that the pace of implementation can be improved through strengthened mechanisms for accountability across the legal, moral and political spheres, together with clearly defined relationships between the three phases of the principle.

My delegation also finds merit in the Brazilian initiative on responsibility while protecting, as it provides clarity in the strategy for implementing the responsibility to protect, particularly in relation to accountability and transparency. Going by the most recent developments, that already appears to be a promising direction for reaching desired outcomes in the implementation of the responsibility to protect.

Building resilience at the community, national, regional and global levels involves developing functional institutions of good governance at all levels. They must be anchored in a robust human rights regime and driven by the principles of local ownership, transparency, dialogue and inclusiveness, respect for diversity, accountability, equity, the rule of law and solidarity. In addition, building stability and resilience in transitional societies also requires a cautious and deliberate balance between retributive and restorative

justice. In our view, good governance guarantees national stability and peace, which are authentic marks of State sovereignty.

My delegation shares the view that regional and subregional arrangements can help to further develop capacities for early warning and assessment of atrocity crimes through a review of their current response capacities and the support they give to their respective member States. In that regard, we wish to stress that national ownership of regional strategies is a sine qua non for sustainable and transforming action in the responsibility to protect. We have learned from situations that have played out in parts of Africa and the Middle East that acts of omission or commission at the national and regional levels are critical in determining whether prevention and robust ex post facto intervention will be effective or will be undermined.

It is worth mentioning that the African Union, at its fiftieth anniversary summit in 2013 in Addis Ababa, undertook to promote a holistic and systematic approach towards attaining the 2020 target of a conflict-free Africa. African States have therefore committed to the speedy implementation of existing instruments of human rights, rule of law, democracy, elections and good governance. The strategic Conflict Prevention Framework of the Economic Community of West African States, under implementation since 2007, and the Monrovia Declaration, on the development of capacity in mediation efforts, are also particularly relevant in that regard.

Mr. Biang (Gabon), Vice-President, took the Chair.

Ghana is deeply appreciative of its continued partnership with like-minded countries — Australia, Italy, Qatar, Denmark, Rwanda, France, Costa Rica and Finland, to name a few — in promoting national and regional ownership and implementation of the responsibility to protect. We commend the Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect for their support and active engagement with Member States and regional organizations, and call for their cooperation in the development of options to enhance early warning and early action.

Ghana attaches great importance to collaboration with civil society as strategic partners in the implementation of the responsibility to protect. In our national experience, non-partisan support in favour of civil-society organization initiatives by various political parties and our Parliament helped in the creation of Ghana's National Peace Council as an independent State institution of mediation and peace facilitation. The National Peace Council today is an important part of Ghana's governance and peace architecture, as well as a key component of relevant strategic partnerships forged with bilateral, regional and global institutions.

The complementarity of the different pillars of governance and peace infrastructure and their interactive nature came into play during the Supreme Court hearing on Ghana's presidential election petition in 2012. The hearing and its outcome demonstrated the role of the judiciary, as an important pillar of governance and peace, in promoting the rule of law and safeguarding electoral integrity. Other national institutions that played a critical role in the process included the independent Electoral Commission; the Inter-Party Advisory Committee; the executive, through its National Security Council; traditional authorities; the National Peace Council; the National Commission for Civic Education and faith-based institutions

Clearly, building capacity for good governance and peace should encompass all institutions in the business of development and institutions in the area of constitution-building, the rule of law and accountability oversight, as well as independent watchdog and advocacy agencies. We want to stress that building prevention capacities at the community and national levels must be prioritized, together with the effective mobilization of the requisite resources for the effective implementation of the responsibility to protect.

In closing, my delegation calls on Member States to declare their support for the responsibility to protect and to enable all views to be considered in the preparation of the report and outcome of this debate. Finally, the combined effect of the responsibility to protect, the responsibility while protecting and the responsibility to remember should help us make progress in preventing and ending genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, and in building resilience.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to align myself with the statements made earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

We welcome the inclusion of the responsibility to protect as a formal agenda item of the General Assembly for the first time since 2009, 10 years ago. I was at that event, and I think it astonishing that we have waited 10 years before once again addressing the responsibility to protect in the General Assembly. I support the calls of colleagues for it to become a standing item.

My Government, the United Kingdom, remains fully committed to the responsibility to protect. The principle is outlined in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (resolution 60/1), which has been endorsed by all Member States. The Secretary-General was spot on to talk about dispelling mistrust, although at times I have the feeling that some of that mistrust is vexatious rather than genuine. At the same time, we acknowledge the concern that the principle of the responsibility to protect is sometimes used with double motives. We must fully address that concern.

Despite the widespread endorsement of the concept, it is disturbing to hear United Nations reports that armed conflict and persecution have led to more than 68 million people being forcibly displaced, more than 22 million becoming internally displaced refugees and 10 million people becoming stateless. If I may, I would like to address in turn the three pillars of the responsibility to protect.

Under the first pillar, States should uphold their obligations under international human rights, humanitarian rights and refugee law. National ownership is important, but it needs to be just that. It is not a national license to mistreat one's own population, and there are too many examples of States that fail the first pillar of the responsibility to protect because they are either unwilling or unable to bear their own responsibility to protect.

There is a fundamental tension here. The more that Member States do not want to hold a spotlight up to what is happening with the persecution of minorities and other communities in a particular State, the more likely it is that that persecution will eventually lead to a bigger crisis affecting neighbouring States and therefore come to the wider attention of the international community, including the Security Council, and increase the prospect of international engagement or, ultimately, possibly even some form of intervention. That intervention does not have to be military, but we all know that sanctions remain a tool on the Council's agenda. So I reiterate that there is a fundamental tension, and I think we do not give that tension enough of our own attention in this Hall.

Under the second pillar, early warning and conflict prevention, we support the Secretary-General's reforms and the linkages he draws in his report between preventive capacities, especially those of Member States, and the responsibility to protect. We welcome his assessment that there should be a more systematic and structured approach across the United Nations, including in New York, Geneva and the field offices, to information gathering, the assessment of atrocity risk and collective analysis, so that Member States can receive earlier recommendations for action and prevention and can draw collective attention to them, as necessary.

The United Nations Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect has an essential role in helping mainstream the responsibility to protect, both within the United Nations and on an international level, and the United Nations Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect have important roles to play in bringing potential atrocity risks to the attention of the Council. We therefore hope that the position of Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect will be filled soon.

I would like to say a word about sustaining peace. We agree with the Secretary-General's vision for sustaining peace, which rightly focuses on conflict prevention, greater coordination across the United Nations system and peacebuilding. Four areas of the United Kingdom's own focus within the sustaining peace agenda are diversification of the approaches of the United Nations so that it has a greater range of tools to deploy, development to address conflict drivers, diplomacy to de-escalate crises and create a longer-term peace, and delivery so that things can be efficient and inclusive and can leverage partnerships.

With regard to mediation, the Secretary-General is to be congratulated on the progress that the United Nations has made in addressing the greater need for mediation across the system. We all know that active preventive diplomacy and mediation can help to prevent atrocities, but here I come back to the tension that I highlighted earlier. The United Kingdom has been a staunch supporter of a strengthened and more agile United Nations mediation capacity. We applaud the

work of the Mediation Support Unit and the Department of Political Affairs in this critical area. Mediation has made an important contribution to preventing and reducing conflict around the world, and we welcome the establishment in 2017 of the High-level Advisory Board on Mediation.

I want to make a special reference to women. They hold a key role in mediation, and we hope that the United Nations can increase the number of female special envoys nominated by the Secretary-General and the number of women nominated for the Mediation Standby Unit, to join the women who have been chosen.

Turning to the third pillar of the responsibility to protect, "never again" has to really mean something. Expelling populations and loading communities onto trains all have a very special resonance for the United Nations and its Member States. If countries do not want international engagement, they must look after their own populations to the standards that the United Nations expects. We support the need for effective accountability for atrocity crimes, which can help deter recurrence. States have the primary responsibility to investigate and prosecute crimes committed within their jurisdiction, while international courts and hybrid tribunals can play an important role when States are unwilling or genuinely unable to act.

The United Kingdom is pleased to provide financial, logistical and political support to a broad range of judicial and investigatory mechanisms, and we urge others to contribute to those accountability efforts. In particular, we encourage all States to support the implementation of Security Council resolution 2379 (2017), which sets up an investigative team to assist efforts to hold Da'esh accountable for crimes committed in Iraq.

In closing, I would like to echo the words of the Permanent Representative of Kiribati, who stated that no one country can do this alone. The United Kingdom stands ready to play its part, along with our international friends and colleagues.

Mr. Akbaruddin (India): We meet today to address in this setting an issue that has been a long time in the making. The item on the agenda touches on differing philosophical bases of inter-State ties, varied historical experiences in the interpretation of key concepts and sharply divergent recent experiences in translating international precepts into practice. It is therefore understandable that the process of deciding whether or not to even debate the subject has led to the articulation of strong arguments on either side of those fault lines for the many years since the Assembly debated it in 2009.

For its part, India supported the inclusion of the item on the agenda of the General Assembly at its seventy-second session. We did so because we believe that normative issues, however complex and sensitive, should be debated. At the core of that approach is the belief that ideas matter. Our hope is that today's discussion will enhance our understanding of the fundamental precepts involved and place on record the commonalities, as well as bring to light different perspectives and provide an opportunity to assess where we all stand.

India's consistent position is that the responsibility to protect its population is one of the foremost responsibilities of every State and that the right to life is one of the those from which no derogation is permitted. We draw that not only from our present Constitution, but from a historical tradition imbued with the same belief. A rock edict of Emperor Ashoka in the third century B.C. had the inscription:

> "This is my rule: Government by the law, administration according to the law, gratification of my subjects under the law and protection through the law."

We therefore firmly believe that in today's internationalist global order, individual States can and should be encouraged and assisted to meet such responsibilities. Indeed, it is the responsibility of our generation to support the evolution of such norms of legitimacy.

In short, India, like many others, has little disagreement with the rationale of the cardinal features of the first and second pillars of the responsibility to protect. However, we are of the view that appropriate ways should be found to address the legally complex and politically challenging issues that underlie the third pillar. In our view, the ability of the international community to take appropriate collective action if a State manifestly fails to fulfil its responsibility to protect its population is still riddled with serious gaps that must be reflected on.

The quest for a more just global order should not take place in a manner that will undermine the international order itself. Resorting to force by States acting on behalf of the international community through intervention,

as a legitimate means of enforcing rights in the face of a State's perceived inability to fulfil its responsibilities in that regard, is contrary to the internationalist impulse of our age.

Experience shows that implementing the notion of the responsibility to protect in order to prevent or stop major internal abuses within a State has in several instances been used to frame or justify interventions by external Powers. They include instances when the Security Council failed to agree to intervene under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and other instances when mandates have been interpreted in a manner not envisaged by all actors. Such interventions have destabilized entire regions and have often been perceived to have been undertaken to further the strategic interests of certain Powers.

At the same time, there have arguably been other instances, well known and otherwise, in which major abuses have been committed or continue to be committed with impunity. Many such situations of non-action can be attributed either to a lack of strategic interest on the part of some or, worse, to the fact that their specific interests will not allow for any change in the status quo.

While the responsibility to protect, at its core, has an appeal as a noble cause, it has been selectively used in the context of a wider geostrategic balance of power among competing players or groups. We are all aware of the many critical questions that must be addressed if that noble cause is to be pursued in an impartial manner. How can we ensure the commonly accepted legal definitions of the crimes we are discussing? What will qualify as a trigger for action by the international community? Which body is competent to take such a decision? What happens if such a body is grossly unrepresentative of the wider international community and of contemporary global realities? What happens if the record of such a body in addressing common challenges and, consequently, its legitimacy, is in serious question?

In short, it is our view that the current system of collective international security, which should be enforced through the Security Council, cannot isolate the implementation of a concept such as the responsibility to protect from double standards, selectivity, arbitrariness and misuse for political gains.

The requirements that are essential to implement the responsibility to protect — such as just causes, right intentions, last resorts, proportional means, reasonable prospects and the right authority to take a decision — remain elusive and contested. Though there is no common understanding on such concepts related to the four crimes referred to in the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, some have even sought to expand the scope of the responsibility to protect to include situations that may arise from pandemics, climate change and natural disasters. We get into even greater difficulty in such scenarios.

The current architecture of peace and security is similar to the philosopher Bertrand Russell's description of the world in 1931: "The universe is all spots and jumps, without unity, without continuity, without coherence or orderliness". Proceeding with perilous interventions in such a situation is tantamount to placing belief in a false prophet.

At this stage, there remain huge and glaring gaps in building a common understanding on how or even whether to proceed with such a concept in the present system of global governance. Investing common political will in building more representative and inclusive governance structures nationally and globally, strengthening capacities in global structures for greater opportunities for much wider sections of populations and for nations, and providing more equitable access to resources to build and sustain peace and prosperity are requirements that we continue to fall short in fulfilling.

We hope today's debate will serve as a barometer of the distance that we must all travel to meet our quest for a common understanding of this important subject. We should address issues in a more holistic manner so as to ensure that the concept that we are debating today can acquire the legitimacy that it deserves.

Mr. Duque Estrada Meyer (Brazil): This is the first time since 2009 that the General Assembly is holding a formal debate on the responsibility to protect, and it is long overdue. Such a format allows us to better articulate our ideas on an issue with outstanding conceptual questions. Equally important, it allows for interpretation in all official languages and for a webcast and an official record to be produced, all of which are crucial not only for transparency but also for us to better understand one another's concerns and identify common ground.

Since 2005, the Assembly has adopted only one resolution, of a procedural nature, on the responsibility to protect (resolution 63/308). In the meantime, the

Security Council has adopted more than 70 resolutions and 20 presidential statements that refer to it. As the most democratic organ of the United Nations, the Assembly should reclaim ownership and shape the debate on the protection of populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

I thank the Secretary-General for his most recent report on the responsibility to protect (A/72/884) and take this opportunity to voice Brazil's appreciation for the work undertaken since the last formal debate by all of the Special Advisers on the Responsibility to Protect — Edward Luck, Jennifer Welsh and Ivan Šimonović. Their work has always been marked by respectful and constructive engagement with all delegations.

To avoid conceptual doubts, we would have preferred that the report of the Secretary-General refrain from using broad and undefined expressions such as "atrocities" as synonyms for the four responsibility-to-protect crimes. Genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity are indeed atrocious, but so are other crimes not encompassed by the responsibility to protect, such as aggression.

With a view to improving the method of implementing the responsibility to protect, in 2011 Brazil circulated a concept note on responsibility while protecting. In all interactive informal dialogues since then, we have further deepened our suggestions in that regard.

Prevention is always the best policy. As the Secretary-General said, it costs far more to pick up the pieces after crises than it does do prevent them. The report includes recommendations for improving early warning by developing a systematic and structured approach so as to overcome the current fragmentation of information-gathering and assessment. The proposed reform of the peace and security pillar could be an avenue for that.

But prevention should not be seen solely from a short-term perspective — that is, focusing on situations on the brink of collapse. It must also be addressed from a structural perspective. Long-lasting peace requires promoting sustainable development, ensuring food security, eradicating poverty and reducing inequality. It involves tackling marginalization, discrimination and other legitimate grievances that may be at the root of conflict. It also encompasses post-conflict scenarios to avoid a relapse into violence.

Seen from that broader perspective, the implementation of the first and second pillars of the responsibility to protect has been limited by a lack of adequate, predictable and sustainable funding. It is disappointing, for instance, that peacebuilding remains utterly underfunded and that the international community is still short of meeting its official development assistance target of 0.7 per cent of gross domestic product.

Prevention also means giving priority to diplomacy. Our collective responsibility does not need to translate into collective security action in order to be effective. We must value, pursue and exhaust all non-military means available for the protection of civilians under threat of violence. Preventive and responsive tools should follow a sequential logic, meaning, above all, that coercive measures and the use of military force should always be our last option.

The implementation of the first and second pillars involves little controversy, but the same cannot be said of the third. We should engage in forward-looking discussions aimed at finding solutions to misgivings from the past. It is crucial to develop an understanding of what force can and cannot accomplish. More often than not, strategies based on a hasty resort to force exacerbate the suffering of innocent people and lead to negative humanitarian consequences that cause more harm than good.

While Brazil is a strong advocate of the primacy of prevention, we do not deny that military force might be envisaged in exceptional circumstances, but only in strict compliance with the Charter of the United Nations. The protection of human rights and the prevention of international crimes cannot be used as an excuse to unilaterally resort to force. Our resolve to stop such violations cannot make us turn a blind eye to international law.

In circumstances when military action is authorized by the Security Council or the General Assembly, it should be judicious, proportionate and in compliance with the mandate. It should be limited in its legal, operational and temporal dimensions, and when considering this exceptional measure we must demand adequate reporting and the establishment of a panel of experts to monitor its implementation.

There is a sense of frustration about the inability of the Security Council to provide solutions to situations where civilians are in danger. One aspect of the problem

lies in the Council's composition and its methods of work. Reforming the Security Council and expanding both categories of its membership, has become an overdue task for the Organization.

Another challenge in the implementation of the responsibility to protect is ensuring that there are no double standards. Civilians in one country are no less deserving of protection than those in others, including in illegally occupied territories. The current refugee and migrant crisis also calls for a renewed commitment to our responsibility to protect. It is inconsistent to uphold a responsibility to protect civilians in situations of conflict and turn one's back on the very civilians fleeing such scenarios when they knock on one's door.

Ms. Eckels-Currie (United States of America): Today we are witnessing record-breaking levels of human displacement, with unprecedented numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, more than 68 million people, forced to flee their homes. The fully man-made humanitarian and human rights crises such as those in Syria, Burma, and South Sudan, which are driving that mass displacement, highlight the urgent need for all Member States to adhere to international humanitarian law and international human rights law, and for a coordinated and speedy international response to mass atrocities.

The United States remains deeply committed to preventing, mitigating and responding to atrocity crimes, and we urge the international community to do more to act in concert and respond before they occur. We are pleased to be here today to reaffirm our support for the responsibility to protect civilians from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity and to make a particular plea for more timely and decisive action in the Security Council on current and future humanitarian crises.

We are currently seeing a tremendous human toll resulting from unchecked atrocities across the globe. Regarding South Sudan, the Council has been paralysed since it passed resolution 2206 (2015). Meanwhile, more than 2 million people have fled the fighting in the last two years. The United Nations has observed and reported on the widespread commission of mass atrocities and gross human rights violations in South Sudan. We have recently renewed the Council sanctions established under resolution 2206 (2015), but we must do more. The United States has repeatedly called on the Council and the United Nations to support sanctions on those accountable for these atrocities and for a comprehensive arms embargo. Our commitment to the responsibility to protect should result in real action to address modern-day atrocities, such as those in South Sudan, yet we have too often fallen short or failed to act when we can could or should.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on early warning and early action (A/72/884), including the assertion that effective atrocity prevention means helping countries to avert the outbreak of atrocity crimes. The United States believes that more should be done to improve our responses to early warning signals, including overcoming the uncertainties, hesitancy and lack of political will that impede early action. It is worth the investment to prevent the high human cost of those crimes.

In fact, we all know that the costs of prevention — in the form of improving human rights institutions, the fair administration of justice and equitable, accountable governance — pale in comparison to the political, financial and military costs typically required to respond to a crisis. We applaud the Secretary-General's efforts to empower and coordinate a broader set of actors, including civil society, parliaments, national human rights institutions, regional organizations and the entire United Nations system.

Further strengthening the principle of the responsibility to protect and building knowledge of the range of preventive action can also help turn early warning into early action. To that end, the United States supports scheduling regular, open debates in the Security Council, including on emerging threats and human rights issues that threaten to escalate into atrocities, and we support including the responsibility to protect as a standing item on the General Assembly agenda.

We also commend the Secretary-General's initiative on gathering and sharing lessons learned on effective early warning and early action. We strongly encourage him to appoint the next Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect as soon as possible in order to advance international commitments and tools for effective atrocity prevention within the United Nations framework. The United States encourages Member States to follow the Secretary-General's call to create a national focal point for the responsibility to protect, conduct assessments consistent with the United Nations Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes and take

early action on the findings. It is vital that those focal points do more than simply carry a title.

The United States continues to strengthen its preventive capacities through the Atrocities Prevention Board, which coordinates a whole-of-Government approach to bolstering our ability to forecast, prevent and respond to mass atrocities. The Board oversees global risk analysis, followed by deeper analysis of prioritized countries, identifying potential pathways to atrocities and opportunities to prevent or mitigate them, including by expanding existing resiliencies. The Board has coordinated a range of actions, such as targeted sanctions, preventive diplomacy and programming, mediation, improving adherence to the rule of law, documenting atrocities, supporting peacekeepers and evacuating populations under attack.

While the United States recognizes the sovereignty of all Member States, we want to remind them of the commitments they voluntarily entered into to protect their populations from genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. We continue to work with partner countries to strengthen coordination and share best practices, including through the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect. We also recognize the critical role of non-governmental organizations, the media, business and religious leaders, and local populations, including women, in efforts to prevent and respond to mass atrocities. The United States actively engages with those civic actors and organizations to enhance early-warning and early-action efforts, and to reflect on lessons learned.

When prevention fails, promoting accountability for mass atrocity crimes is a priority for the United States. Bringing perpetrators to justice can deter those who might otherwise be emboldened to follow in their footsteps and can help advance post-conflict reconciliation. The United States Government is committed to holding those responsible for atrocities accountable by appropriately bringing them to justice in independent and impartial processes in accordance with fair-trial guarantees. We also recognize the importance of programmes to support survivors and promote reconciliation in the aftermath of atrocities, as a history of atrocities is one of the strongest predictors of similar future events.

The United States Government supports the Secretary-General's efforts to better coordinate the United Nations system in order to prevent atrocities. In particular, we strongly support his recommendation that the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict work more closely with the Joint Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and on the Responsibility to Protect, and we commend the excellent work of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, particularly in the Burma context.

Women are often uniquely positioned within their communities to identify social behaviours and patterns that are warning signs of violence against civilians. The United States strongly supports efforts to promote the meaningful participation of women in the prediction and prevention of outbreaks of mass atrocities. To that end, President Trump signed the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017, making the United States the first country to enact legislation incorporating resolution 1325 (2000) into national law.

States that disregard or violate their primary responsibility to protect their own citizens represent one of the greatest threats to international peace and security we face today. Those who attempt to shield their crimes behind a veil of national sovereignty should find no comfort in this Hall. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written in the aftermath of war and horrors, states in its Preamble that "disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind" — a statement that is sadly no less true today than it was 70 years ago, when that foundational document was created.

We have yet to achieve the highest aspirations laid out in the Universal Declaration, but in fully implementing the responsibility to protect, we can remain true to those aspirations and to our national and collective commitments to them.

Mr. Drobnjak (Croatia): Croatia aligns itself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union. I will add several points in my national capacity.

Croatia very much welcomes this plenary meeting on the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. It has been nine years since the last General Assembly debate on the responsibility to protect, in 2009, and in the light of that regrettably long hiatus, we especially appreciate the renewed opportunity to reaffirm our support for the commitments

made in 2005. Additionally, we welcome the Secretary-General's report this year on the responsibility to protect (A/72/884), providing us with guidance and practical advice on the improvement of early-action assessment and early-warning mechanisms.

Croatia would like to pay tribute to Mr. Ivan Šimonović, whose mandate as the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect ended earlier this year. We salute his tireless efforts to mainstream the responsibility to protect within the United Nations system. We also commend the work of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, Mr. Adama Dieng. We believe the progress achieved so far, particularly in the practical and operational understanding of the concept within the United Nations system, should be maintained and expanded. In that regard, Croatia advocates for the swift appointment of a new Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect.

The world we live in today has changed profoundly since the adoption of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (resolution 60/1) and the initiation of the responsibility-to-protect concept. From today's perspective, it would seem almost impossible to reach a similar consensus on the issues of human rights and protection of civilians from mass atrocities, which is yet another reason to preserve what we have gained and use it as a springboard for future action.

Conflicts across the globe are continuing to escalate, with mounting civilian casualties and deeply wounded societies. Against that background, we must spare no effort to restore confidence in the United Nations institutions and our collective security. Primary responsibility for protection lies with States, but for the sake of the importance of the United Nations, we should improve our way of reaching collective decisions, especially in situations of grave violations of human rights and breaches of international humanitarian law.

We encourage the Security Council to address potential mass atrocity risks and to include prevention on its agenda in a more effective manner. We call for Security Council debates on the responsibility to protect and for Council briefings by the Secretary-General's Special Advisers on early-warning signs.

This year marks the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the adoption of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. They are among the most important documents in the history of the United Nations. They paved the way for practical solutions to threats of mass atrocities and for the mechanisms of timely and decisive action in the form of the responsibility to protect. However, the early enthusiasm lost its momentum, being replaced by restrained and often ineffective collective action. In addition, the use of the veto in the Security Council impedes the protection of human rights in situations posing a risk of mass atrocity crimes.

On the positive side, the meeting of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, held earlier this month and generously hosted by the Governments of Finland and Mexico, reaffirmed the growing support for the values and norms guided by the responsibility to protect. That serves as a good example of how to enhance the global importance of the responsibility to protect among an ever-widening group of supporters, with a view to better implementing the principles of the responsibility to protect in our national and global frameworks.

Croatia is concerned about the troublesome trends in the use by some of forced displacement as a tool of war, thus bringing disastrous consequences upon civilian populations. Today more than 68 million people remain displaced around the world. There are many causes of such misery. One of them is certainly our inability to achieve a consensus on upholding the provisions of the responsibility to protect and preventing the commission of mass atrocity crimes against populations at risk.

My country, unfortunately, has been very familiar with a similar situation in the past. Therefore, and while currently serving as a member of the Human Rights Council, Croatia advocates for strengthening the links of the Geneva-based institutions and the Council's mechanisms of special procedure mandates and universal periodic reviews in preventing and responding to mass atrocity crimes.

In May, Croatia assumed the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for a six-month term. This is our first chairship since we became a member of the Council of Europe in 1996. We are determined to continue promoting and protecting the universality and indivisibility of fundamental rights and combating all forms of discrimination and intolerance. In that vein, Croatia has established the efficient protection of rights of national minorities and vulnerable groups as a theme and priority for its presidency. It aims to improve the system for the protection of rights of national minorities and ensure a

safe and just environment for its implementation, based on respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

In our view, respect for human rights is an essential element in supporting human and sustainable development, and it is the best way to prevent conflict. It is our global and human responsibility.

Mr. Moragas Sánchez (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Spain aligns itself with the statements made earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

This is an important meeting for several reasons. First, this is the first formal debate in the Assembly since 2009 on the responsibility to protect, which is an issue directly related to the most relevant functions and commitments of the Organization. Protecting populations at risk of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes or ethnic cleansing is and should be a priority for the United Nations. In Syria, Iraq, the Central African Republic, Myanmar and Yemen, we are witnessing daily the ravages caused by extreme and indiscriminate violence, the persecution of communities because of their ethnicity or religion and the violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. That reality is what leads us to believe that this agenda item should be a permanent one in order to show our commitment to the discussion and implementation of proposals in this area.

Secondly, this meeting is important because it allows us to highlight the centrality of the preventive element highlighted by the Secretary-General. My country supports the three pillars of the responsibility to protect. Today we are emphasizing the cross-cutting preventive element, because, as we have seen in Myanmar, for example, the costs of failing to act in time are simply unacceptable.

Spain supports appropriate institutionalization in the United Nations in the area of the responsibility to protect through the figure of the Secretary-General's Special Adviser, with access to all the necessary information. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Mr. Šimonović for his excellent work in that capacity up until March. Spain also supports concrete initiatives, such as those articulated by the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide, on the preventive role that religious leaders can also play.

Thirdly, the meeting is important because reality shows us that we must strengthen the links between the various pillars of the Organization, and particularly between the maintenance of international peace and security and human rights, if we are to develop a properly coordinated prevention policy. Let me underline today the importance of the Human Rights Council and its special mechanisms and procedures. Human rights do not contradict sovereignty; on the contrary, their protection is the primary responsibility of any sovereign State.

Fourthly and lastly, this is an important meeting because we are concerned about negative trends that are repeated by the parties to conflicts — trends such as the systematic use of forced displacement, the use of hunger as a weapon of war and the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war and terrorism. Those patterns of action could constitute crimes against humanity, war crimes or genocide.

Let me conclude with some concrete proposals. First, we attached great importance to the responsibility to protect during our service a short time ago on the Security Council, when Spain was a non-permanent member. Together with Chile, we organized the first meeting of the Council on this issue under the Arria Formula. We now call on the members of the Security Council to maximize the possibilities offered by our working methods to incorporate that perspective. That requires the use of the code of conduct and the restriction of the veto, the organization of Arria Formula meetings or the invitation of specific speakers when dealing with high-risk situations.

We also believe that we should explore how the Informal Expert Group on the Protection of Civilians and the Informal Expert Group on Women and Peace and Security, as well as the Working Group on Children and Armed Conflict, can systematically incorporate the responsibility to protect approach, when that is relevant.

In the area of the protection of civilians and peace operations, I want to stress the importance of mandates to protect women and children and the inclusion of atrocity crimes in predeployment training, and that any review should guided by the protection needs of civilians. We also support the implementation of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians and call for compliance with Security Council resolution 2286 (2016), on the protection of medical equipment and

facilities in armed conflict. We also urge more States to sign the Safe Schools Declaration.

I would also like to encourage the use of a responsibility-to-protect perspective in the discourse justifying our migration policies. Spain is trying to do that, and has therefore provided a humanitarian response to a specific crisis and is working to expand that approach to the whole of the European Union.

I should not end without mentioning accountability. Spain reaffirms its recognition of the work of the International Criminal Court in this, the year of the twentieth anniversary of the Rome Statute. We call on all States to cooperate with all mechanisms of investigation, collection and preservation of evidence, with the aim of facilitating accountability in the near future, including in the cases of Syria and Iraq.

Finally, we sometimes engage in conceptual debates that do not contribute to concrete results. To countries that have reservations about this issue, I would humbly say that the responsibility to protect is not merely a function of the third pillar, and neither is the third pillar limited to military intervention. The question is not whether the responsibility to protect applies to a particular situation, as States always have the responsibility to protect their populations. What is truly crucial and important is how to use the measures available under each pillar to prevent and respond to heinous crimes that we all wish to avoid.

Mr. Van Oosterom (Netherlands): Let me first thank the Secretary-General for his briefing this morning and for his comprehensive report (A/72/884).

I would also like to align myself with the statement made earlier by the observer of the European Union and with the joint statement of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect, as delivered by one of the two co-Chairs, our colleague from Qatar.

I would also like to thank Australia and Ghana for their leadership and hard work, which is the reason we can have this debate today, and Italy for taking over the co-chairship of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect this year, in the light of our 2017-2018 split term on the Security Council.

I will focus on three main points, which have also guided our work in the Security Council this year — first, prevention; secondly, peacekeeping and the protection of civilians; and thirdly, accountability.

First, preventing mass atrocity crimes is the core aim of the responsibility to protect. In that regard, early action remains one of the main challenges. When Governments call upon the international community to assist them, we should heed that call at the very early stages. We believe that mediators can play a crucial role in addressing and reconciling the interests of different actors. In that context, mediators could also focus on root causes of grievances. That also means listening to young people, whose desire to participate in decision-making over their own future is, of course, legitimate. If we really want mediation to be successful, we must ensure that the spoilers of peace processes are held accountable, for example, through targeted sanctions. The draft manual for responsibility-to-protect focal points, drafted by the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, is a useful instrument to collect all the lessons learned and best practices, including in the domain of mediation.

That brings me to my second point, peacekeeping and the protection of civilians. Much has been achieved in the area of the protection of civilians through peace operations. However, we should not look away from the dark pages of our history. We in the Netherlands know that all too well. Those dark pages give us an extra historical responsibility to help prevent mass atrocities. We have a responsibility to remember, as our colleague from Ghana said. We are therefore committed to learning from the past, so improving United Nations peace operations remains one of our priorities. We fully support the Secretary-General's efforts in that regard, and we commend his Action for Peacekeeping initiative, launched in the Security Council during our March presidency (see S/PV.8218).

Indeed, peacekeeping is one of the most concrete tools at our disposal in protecting civilians and laying a foundation for a safer environment. In that connection, let me recall the importance of the Kigali Principles on the Protection of Civilians in improving peacekeeping operations. We call on States that have not yet done so to endorse them.

The Security Council has demonstrated that other initiatives can also help to ensure that the protection of civilians and other issues related to the responsibility to protect remain high on its agenda. In that regard, I would like to the Council's recent adoption of resolution 2417 (2018), on banning starvation as a method of warfare, which was a Dutch initiative.

My third and last point is the importance of accountability. When national judicial systems fail to ensure accountability for perpetrators of the most serious crimes, we should make use of the various instruments at our disposal, and the International Criminal Court constitutes the most appropriate path. This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the Rome Statute. We reiterate the importance of the universal ratification of the Statute by Member States.

If paths to justice remain blocked, we must not waver in our efforts. A good example is the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, which we adopted in this Hall when the Security Council was blocked by the use of the veto by one of its permanent members. Another example is sanctions, which play an important role in ensuring a culture of accountability. Also, in our view, sanctions can have a preventive and deterrent effect in averting the escalation of serious rights violations and atrocity crimes, exemplified by the sanctions on human traffickers recently imposed by the Security Council.

The principle of the responsibility to protect is crucial in preventing mass atrocity crimes and ensuring sustainable peace. All those instruments and initiatives show that when it comes to the responsibility to protect, the international community is more united than it sometimes seems. However, in order to realize effective international action in situations where action is called for, we must do more. Ongoing dialogue among States in the relevant international forums is key. Here in the General Assembly, the parliament of the world, we can do so by making the responsibility to protect a standing agenda item. This meeting, the first of its kind since 2009, confirms our collective belief that implementing the responsibility to protect is more needed than ever today. May the responsibility to remember reinforce our collective will to prevent mass atrocities and strengthen accountability.

Ms. Bavdaž Kuret (Slovenia): Slovenia strongly welcomes today's General Assembly formal debate on the responsibility to protect, the first of its kind since 2009. We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report this year (A/72/884).

Slovenia aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Responsibility to Protect.

Slovenia has been a strong supporter of the principle of the responsibility to protect from the very start. Today we want to once again express our full and continuing support for the principle and for the work of the Secretary-General and his Special Advisers. We welcome their efforts to improve the system-wide capacity of the United Nations to prevent and respond to serious violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, especially those that may amount to mass atrocity crimes.

Today's formal debate, and the inclusion of the responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity on the General Assembly's agenda at its seventy-second session, could not be more timely, since this is the year we celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. We join other States in thanking Ghana and Australia for their strong leadership in including the responsibility to protect on the Assembly's agenda. We support that and would welcome the inclusion of the responsibility to protect as a standing agenda item of the General Assembly.

In 2005 the global community decided that more had to be done to strengthen our joint efforts to prevent atrocity crimes and protect all populations from ever being their victims. The latest report, however, once again reminds us of a hard reality. We are still looking at images of armed conflicts and acts of violent extremism and with widespread and systematic violations of human rights, international humanitarian law and the rule of law in general.

Slovenia reiterates here today that no effort should be spared to systematically invest in the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. Slovenia organized and hosted several regional meetings and academic conferences on the responsibility to protect in 2013, 2015 and 2017 with various stakeholders from Europe, as well as other regions. Valuable knowledge, good practices and experiences were shared among participants, leading to the endorsement of the Chair's statement regarding the responsibility to protect and the prevention of mass atrocity crimes during the third meeting of European responsibility-to-protect focal points. in 2017.

Time and again at the United Nations we have heard strong calls to improve the international community's ability to take timely and decisive early action. While we recognize the primary role of the Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security, a great deal can be done by Member States, the Secretariat and the wider United Nations system. We therefore strongly support the efforts of the Secretary-General to improve the system-wide capacity of the United Nations to prevent and respond to serious and systemic violations of human rights law and international humanitarian law. In that context, we once again stress the importance of the Human Rights Up Front initiative as an important tool for improving alertness and effectiveness early on. We also encourage the use of every other tool available, including the Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes.

Slovenia firmly supports the code of conduct developed by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group, and the French-Mexican initiative, which calls on the permanent members of the Security Council to agree to voluntarily refrain from using the veto in situations of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. We also see value in regular briefings of the Security Council by the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as by the Special Advisers to the Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect. Geneva-based institutions and mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review and special procedures mandate holders can play a role in increasing early awareness and early-action efforts.

Slovenia once again affirms its strong commitment to remaining an advocate of the responsibility to protect and the wider promotion and protection of human rights. We will continue to contribute in the advancement of human rights in international human rights forums, as well as in our role as an active member of the Human Rights Council.

A crucial aspect in preventing the recurrence of conflicts is ensuring accountability for all responsibility-to-protect crimes and other serious abuses of human rights and international humanitarian law. Slovenia remains a strong supporter of the International Criminal Court, as well as regional and State mechanisms for countering impunity. For the past 20 years, the Rome Statute has offered an important legal framework in this context and has acted as a deterrent to the most heinous crimes. Slovenia will continue to advocate for the universality of the Rome Statute, including the Kampala amendments.

We, the Member States, have the primary responsibility to protect our populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. It is our responsibility to meet our obligations under international law and to condemn any actions that go against the norms and principles that safeguard humankind. But as we have said many times during informal dialogues in previous years, the obligations go beyond that. Differing views on how to achieve that, many of which we will hear today in this Hall, must not inhibit our joint determination and our commitment to protecting populations in the future from crimes related to the responsibility to protect. Coordinated action and preventive measures require closer and stronger links among nations. We therefore welcome the growing network of responsibility-to-protect focal points and encourage all States to join.

In conclusion, we would also like to recognize the contributions of the previous Special Advisers on the Responsibility to Protect, and we are looking forward to the appointment of the next. Once again, we reaffirm Slovenia's support for the United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect.

Ms. Duncan Villalobos (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica aligns itself with the statement made by the Permanent Representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, and welcomes the fact that for the first time since 2009, the General Assembly has included this item on its agenda. We are grateful for the efforts made by Ghana and Australia to hold this discussion.

My country would like to take this opportunity to renew its legal, moral and political commitment to achieving the full implementation of this principle, recognized in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome document (resolution 60/1), and its three pillars. We call on the membership to keep it on the formal agenda of the General Assembly. We are grateful for the report of the Secretary-General (A/72/884), which reaffirms the relevance and validity of the principle and presents us with the challenges of a much more complex international reality.

Today State and non-State actors are threatening civilian populations and showing a total lack of respect for human life and dignity. Every day millions of people flee the violence and humiliation to which they

are subjected, while thousands of others are killed with impunity. The principle of the responsibility to protect is very closely related to the obligation of States, expressed in many norms of international law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law, to refrain from systemic violations of the human rights of civilian populations.

However, the international community has been reluctant in protecting civilians. Thanks to political divides and geopolitical interests, the principal organs of the United Nations have failed to take the necessary effective action to prevent or stop attacks on civilians. That is why today we strongly urge the members of the Security Council, whether permanent or elected, to honour the Charter of the United Nations and fulfil their mandate to ensure prompt and effective action in upholding the Council's primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. We also urge the permanent members to refrain from using the veto in situations of genocide, atrocity crimes and crimes against humanity.

Collective international action to prevent mass atrocities must be based on impartial information gathered in a manner not affected by political pressures. For that reason, Costa Rica supports initiatives such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the Human Rights Up Front initiative, and we call on the membership to support the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group's code of conduct on genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity.

In addition, we invite the Assembly to take on the recommendations of the Secretary-General on strengthening internal mechanisms for the early warning and prevention of atrocities by implementing efficient communication and collaboration mechanisms at the national level, and through greater and better coordination at the international level among the principal organs of the United Nations and the mechanisms established by the relevant Security Council resolutions.

We agree with the Secretary-General's view that early warning is the essence of the principle of the responsibility to protect, taking into account prevention in all spheres of public life. We call for incorporating into domestic legal systems the international norms of human rights and international humanitarian law and for ensuring accountability at all levels of authority, both civil and military. Furthermore, we call for the appointment of focal points to participate in the Global Network of R2P Focal Points.

In order to prevent the recurrence of atrocities, it is imperative to address processes for post-conflict national reconciliation through transitional justice, the preservation of memory and the reconstruction of social peace. For that, it is necessary to end impunity and bring those responsible to justice, and to refrain from granting immunity and amnesty to the perpetrators. We invite those who have not yet done so to sign the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court and all its amendments. We call on all of us that are States parties to the Statute to carry out the decisions in line with our international obligations.

Mr. Mlynár (Slovakia): First, I would like to express our sincere appreciation to the President for presiding over this important meeting, and to him and to the Secretary-General for their introductory words, as well as for the convening of the meeting.

At the outset, Slovakia aligns itself with the statements delivered earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect, of which Slovakia is also a proud member.

Last year, Slovakia firmly supported the inclusion of item 132, "Responsibility to protect and the prevention of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity", on the Assembly's agenda at its seventy-second session. A formal debate, the first since 2009, is clearly the appropriate forum for discussions on the responsibility to protect. We hope that today's debate will not remain an exception in the row of informal interactive dialogues, and we therefore support the inclusion of the responsibility to protect as a standing item on the Assembly's agenda.

Slovakia greatly appreciates the Secretary-General's recent report on the responsibility to protect (A/72/884). We fully subscribe to the view that the responsibility to protect forms an integral part of the broader prevention agenda. On one hand, focusing on the issue of implementing the responsibility to protect can show the practical gains flowing from that concept in specific situations. On the other hand, it is potentially

easier to reassure doubts about the concept in that way than by having a general theoretical discussion.

The three pillars of the responsibility to protect are interconnected and mutually reinforcing. No one questions the primary responsibility of the State to protect its own population from atrocity crimes. However, assistance provided by the international community — with the consent of the host State, and preferably at its own request — can significantly aid the efforts of individual Member States.

Building national capacities and resilient institutions is not only essential for fulfilling national obligations to prevent mass atrocities but also significantly contributes to a better and more sustainable life for people. Good governance, the rule of law and effective judicial and security institutions are indispensable for thriving societies that respect and guarantee the human rights and freedoms of all individuals.

Slovakia has been actively engaged in many efforts related to this particular agenda. As co-Chair of the Group of Friends of Security Sector Reform, we consider that agenda to be closely linked to the responsibility to protect, and the nexus is a very important component of our wider efforts to build successful and just societies. Security institutions are most likely to interfere with the people's rights. High-quality training, a strictly rule-of-law-based approach and effective oversight are indispensable for their correct performance of their duties. Security-sector reform is also essential to overall stabilization and reconstruction, especially in transitional societies.

In spite of the efforts of the international community, atrocity crimes, sadly enough, are still being committed. That is the point where accountability mechanisms become even more visible and essential. In that respect, the role of the International Criminal Court, as an independent and impartial judicial body prosecuting situations where national jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to address the issue of accountability, is crucial. We call on all States Members of the United Nations that have not yet done so to ratify the Rome Statute and its amendments, and thereby help achieve its universality. We also support other international accountability mechanisms such as the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011 and the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

In conclusion, I would like to reaffirm that we are firmly convinced of the value of the full implementation of the concept of the responsibility to protect. Only sincere and effective action can safeguard the humanity and dignity of the people of our planet for the future.

Mr. Hoshino (Japan): At the outset, I would like to thank the President for convening this important meeting. The Government of Japan welcomes the holding of a formal debate on the responsibility to protect in the General Assembly, the first on the responsibility to protect since 2009, and we commend Australia and Ghana for their leadership in that regard.

As the Secretary-General's report (A/72/884) correctly points out, the gap has grown. The primary responsibility of States and the collective responsibility of the international community to protect people from mass atrocities are fully acknowledged today. Nevertheless, civilians are increasingly trapped in armed conflict. The increase in battle-related deaths has been sharp and the number of people forcibly displaced is larger than ever. I agree with the Secretary-General that we should match our commitments to the experience of vulnerable people on the ground, and I want to highlight once again that prevention and early action are key in the context of the responsibility to protect.

In 2015, as the concept of responsibility to protect became clearer, Japan decided to join the Global Network of R2P Focal Points. For the past three years we have been participating actively in discussions with relevant Member States, the United Nations and civil society with the aim of preventing mass atrocities. I believe that now is the time for the international community to work together to implement the responsibility to protect.

In the belief that Japan has an active role to play, we have been mobilizing our official development assistance for building the capacity of Member States so as to assist national efforts in areas related to the responsibility to protect, such as the rule of law, and organizing various types of seminars for legal experts and Government officials in Asia and Africa.

For example, for the past three years, Japan has conducted a training course on criminal justice for French-speaking African countries, with eight francophone African countries participating, targeting

individuals working in the field of criminal justice. In Viet Nam, we have been lending technical assistance for more than 20 years. Such training courses and assistance aim to improve criminal investigation standards in the target countries, ensure the protection of the human rights of suspects, improve the planning and management of criminal justice-related institutions and thereby contribute to strengthening capacities in the area of the rule of law.

We strongly believe that the international community's collective action in linking development assistance with the responsibility to protect will help advance the implementation of prevention and early action. Japan intends to further promote its support in the areas that I just mentioned.

We also believe that the Security Council not only has the primary responsibility for dealing with actual conflicts but should also play a more active role in preventing them. Unfortunately, however, we have witnessed some cases where the Security Council failed to fulfil its function to prevent or end mass atrocities, owing to the use of the veto. In that connection, Japan continues to support the initiative of France and Mexico on the suspension of the veto in the case of mass atrocities, as well as the code of conduct formulated by the Accountability, Coherence and Transparency group.

Considering the reality of the increasing gap between our commitment and what is happening on the ground, it goes without saying that we should all redouble our efforts to protect people from mass atrocities. The international community has been discussing the concept of the responsibility to protect since the 2005 World Summit. Its implementation requires our continued commitment and collective efforts. Japan supports the inclusion of the responsibility to protect as a formal standing agenda item of the General Assembly and is determined to collaborate with the international community on this critical and very important issue.

Mr. Petersen (Denmark): At the outset, I would like to align myself with the statements made earlier by the observer of the European Union and by the representative of Qatar on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect.

Denmark welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the responsibility to protect (A/72/884). For us, the responsibility to protect is a key principle, building on existing international law, and we reaffirm our commitment to the World Summit Outcome document (resolution 60/1). The responsibility to protect is a call for preventive action, and its three pillars are of equal importance. The responsibility to protect is, first and foremost, about the State protecting its entire population against atrocity crimes.

We fully agree with the Secretary-General's assessment that the implementation of our responsibility to protect is an important part of the wider prevention agenda, which also includes the very vital Human Rights Up Front initiative. We therefore welcome the Secretary-General's pledges to bring atrocity risks to the attention of all relevant United Nations organs and to encourage a more integrated approach to atrocity prevention within the United Nations. We offer our full support to the Secretary-General in that regard, and we urge the swift appointment of a new Special Adviser on the Responsibility to Protect. As we know, the Special Adviser plays a key role in assisting Member States in their work on implementing atrocity prevention, and we would like to underscore that a new adviser should ideally have practical experience with atrocity prevention in a Member State context.

Denmark welcomes today's opportunity to discuss the implementation of our commitment to protect our populations from atrocity crimes. This formal debate allows us to exchange views, raise issues and highlight good practices. That is fully in line with the 2005 World Summit Outcome document, which stressed the importance of ensuring that the General Assembly continues to consider the responsibility to protect. We therefore support the call of the Secretary-General and many other Member States today to make it a standing item in the Assembly.

The responsibility to protect is primarily a Member State commitment and this meeting should therefore include reporting by Member States. How do we all honour the solemn promise of "never again", as enshrined in the principle of the responsibility to protect and the Genocide Convention? I would like to report on some of the initiatives that Denmark has recently undertaken to implement our commitment to the responsibility to protect.

The preventive and universal nature of the responsibility to protect makes it necessary for all of us to apply it in a domestic context. With regard to the first pillar, the Danish Government has initiated discussions with our national human rights institution on how to integrate the responsibility to protect into our national

human rights reporting. We also recently co-organized the third global meeting of Global Action Against Mass Atrocity Crimes. The meeting was generously hosted by the Government of Uganda and convened more than 40 Governments and regional and international organizations, as well as a large number of civil-society organizations. The focus of the meeting was the strengthening of national architectures to prevent atrocity crimes.

With regard to the second pillar, earlier this year Denmark published an independent research report on how to implement the responsibility to protect in Danish foreign policy, focusing on human rights and development cooperation. The report highlights a number of concrete areas where we can do better in order to prevent atrocity crimes and assist Member States in preventing them. We are now working on implementing key recommendations from the report, and we would be happy to share its findings with other Member States.

The Danish Government has also continued its collaboration with other Governments in exercising their responsibility to protect. We remain strongly committed to fighting impunity for atrocity crimes committed by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Sham and others in Iraq and Syria. We actively support the International, Impartial and Independent Mechanism to Assist in the Investigation and Prosecution of Persons Responsible for the Most Serious Crimes under International Law Committed in the Syrian Arab Republic since March 2011, as well as civil society organizations engaged in the collection of evidence to prosecute atrocity crimes. Through our Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Denmark is also engaged in the implementation of the Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.

With regard to the third pillar, Denmark continues to support the unanimous commitment made by Member States in the World Summit Outcome document. If Governments are manifestly unwilling to protect their populations against atrocity crimes, we share a responsibility to take collective action in a timely and decisive manner. That means, for example, the Security Council's referral of relevant situations to the International Criminal Court (ICC). Breaking the cycle of impunity can be an important factor in stopping ongoing and preventing future atrocity crimes. The ICC can be a key asset when it comes to implementing our responsibility to protect. Denmark therefore supports referring the situation in Syria to the ICC and considering the same step for other situations where atrocity crimes are met with impunity.

All our efforts are linked to our national focal point on the responsibility to protect. In our experience, a national focal point is a key facilitator in engaging different Government agencies in atrocity prevention, as well as other stakeholders. Denmark is a proud co-founder of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points, as has been mentioned by others today. It is a vital forum for States to collaborate on the implementation of the responsibility to protect, and we encourage all Member States to join the 60 Governments in the Network.

In conclusion, Denmark welcomes the Secretary-General's recent report on the responsibility to protect. Denmark fully supports the Secretary-General's call for redoubling our efforts, and we look forward to continuing our close cooperation with the Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. We are currently witnessing a number of situations in which populations are enduring unimaginable atrocity crimes. That shows that we all have to invest much more to realize our responsibility to protect. It is our hope that this debate and subsequent actions by Member States, international organizations and civil society will help to improve our record.

Mr. Sandoval Mendiolea (Mexico) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mexico welcomes this first formal debate of the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect and the report of the Secretary-General, entitled "Responsibility to protect: from early warning to early action" (A/72/884).

We support the statement on behalf of the Group of Friends on the Responsibility to Protect delivered by the Ambassador of Qatar.

This debate provides an opportunity to emphasize the need for a holistic focus that includes political, economic and social measures of governance, as well as legal and security measures, that make it possible to design effective measures based on the concept of the responsibility to protect that can be adopted by the General Assembly, because universal values are involved.

The paradigm shift in the United Nations and the reform we are undertaking together with the Secretary-General demand that we embrace our common goals

and develop mechanisms that make it possible to achieve our goals in the best way possible.

Today, prevention, early warning and timely, legitimate action that is in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations are the essential ways for us that we can act on the responsibility to protect. Following the adoption of the concept of sustainable peace and in the light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, we recognize that the United Nations should focus on conflict prevention and address the roots of conflict, instead of devoting a high percentage of its efforts to responding to crisis situations. That means that we must invest in communities and in inclusion in order to ensure a healthy social fabric. There is no better conflict prevention than ensuring sustainable development, inclusion and respect for human rights and the rule of law. That is the paradigm for the twenty-first century on which we should concentrate all our efforts.

From that perspective, in 2016 Mexico promoted the establishment of the Group of Friends of Sustainable Peace, which now involves more than 40 countries and of which we are the current Chair. That concept seeks to consolidate the efforts of the international community to maintain peace before, during and after conflicts, in order to ensure that they are based on the three pillars of the responsibility to protect in a strategic fashion that is consistent with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda. If we want to be successful, our actions must be focused not only on security, but also on development, the fight against poverty and inequality, inclusion and access to justice.

Mexico agrees with the Secretary-General when he indicates in his report that the economic and human costs are very high when we fail to adopt all available measures to prevent mass atrocities. A recent study carried out by the United Nations and the World Bank concluded that during the past decade, the international community spent more than $233 billion on humanitarian responses. Had we invested more in prevention than in response, the countries affected and the international community as a whole would have saved between $5 billion and $70 billion every year. For every dollar spent on prevention, the international community saves seven on crisis management.

The Secretary-General has also emphasized that global and regional networks have become an integral part of the institutional architecture to promote and support States in implementing the responsibility to protect and promoting international cooperation. I wish to take this opportunity to say that beginning with the eighth annual meeting of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points for the responsibility to protect, which was co-sponsored by my country and held in Helsinki on 12 and 14 June, Mexico has a focal point in the Global Network.

Early warning, preventive diplomacy and mediation are intrinsic to the three pillars of the responsibility to protect. Dialogue and the peaceful resolution of conflicts are vital in order to consolidate international cooperation, eradicate the underlying causes of conflicts and promote development. The resident coordinators and representatives of the United Nations in each country have an objective and impartial good-faith role to play in that regard.

Mexico is a member of the Group of Friends of Mediation, promoted by Finland and Turkey, and we believe it is essential to strengthening the role that mediation plays in the peaceful settlement of disputes and conflict prevention. Peace has a woman's face. The involvement of women in endeavours for sustainable development and mediation and in weaving the healthy social fabric that we all wish to see is evident. It is urgent and essential. We trust that this debate will serve to promote mediation as long as that tool continues to be underutilized.

Finally, we cannot talk about the responsibility to protect without mentioning accountability. We continue to be concerned about the Security Council's inaction regarding the use of the veto in situations related to the commission of mass atrocities. Inaction and indifference to human suffering quite simply have no place in multilateral diplomacy and should have no place in the United Nations.

From that perspective, since 2014 Mexico and France have promoted an initiative urging the five permanent members of the Security Council to voluntarily abstain from using their veto power in situations of mass atrocity. Security Council reform should restrict the use of the veto or, rather, include the responsibility that involves refraining from the use of the veto when dealing with situations involving mass atrocities. More than 100 States, to which we are sincerely grateful, have joined that French-Mexican initiative already, and we urge those that have not yet done so to join. Investigating and prosecuting mass atrocities provide

justice to victims and serve as a deterrent for preventing such crimes from happening again.

On 17 July, we will commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. That is the date when the Court's jurisdiction over the crime of aggression came into force. Mexico affirms its commitment to continuing to strengthen the international criminal system in order to ensure that the perpetrators of mass atrocities never go unpunished.

In conclusion, Mexico calls resolutely for strengthening multilateralism to help all of the world's people, for strengthening the United Nations and the governance that we have established, and for strengthening respect for international law and for effective implementation of the legal jurisdiction of the international courts and tribunals.

Mr. Kadiri (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank and congratulate the President on having organized this first formal debate of the General Assembly on the responsibility to protect since 2009.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive statement taking stock of the current state of affairs with regard to the responsibility to protect and shining a light on the challenges facing the international community in preventing genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

My delegation also thanks the Secretary-General for his report entitled "Responsibility to protect: from early warning to early action" (A/72/884), which gives particular attention to early warning and action and in which the responsibility to protect is a key component of that important process.

It is clear that the international community has come a long way in the area of protection, whether that has to do with peacekeeping, respecting and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law or preventing atrocities. However, the international community in general, and our Organization in particular, is still far from attaining the established goals. If the responsibility to protect has garnered more and more support in the international community in recent years, the best way to implement the concept still raises questions. How can we ensure protection while on the one hand avoiding the uncontrolled implementation of the responsibility to protect, and on the other the political instrumentalization or exploitation of its noble objectives? I want to outline my delegation's views on the following areas.

First, we want to recall the interlinkages among the three pillars of the responsibility to protect and reiterate that the third pillar falls primarily to States. However, we must recognize that in conflict situations the capacities of States can be insufficient or non-existent. In those situations, the international community has the responsibility to support them by strengthening their capacities or providing the necessary means to protect their people. That can be done, for instance, by bolstering legal instruments and national institutions and consolidating democracy and the primacy of law. Capacity-building and technical assistance are fundamental preventive measures that enable States to reassert their national mechanisms for protecting their people.

Secondly, States have to shoulder their responsibilities to combat impunity, carry out comprehensive inquiries and prosecute whoever is responsible for committing mass atrocities in order to prevent their recurrence. In that regard, national accountability efforts must be encouraged and supported, including by enhancing judicial cooperation among States.

Thirdly, we want to encourage the various organs of the United Nations system to better use the tools available to them and to act decisively and in a timely way to prevent mass atrocities and strengthen international responsibilities. Moreover, important mechanisms such as the Universal Periodic Review of the Human Rights Council can support prevention efforts, and we encourage States Members of the United Nations to make better use of the Universal Periodic Review process as a preventive mechanism. Furthermore, more sustained guidance from the Human Rights Council on the prevention of mass atrocities through the use of those various mechanisms will certainly reinforce the ability of the international community to combat such heinous crimes. The Human Rights Up Front initiative is also a relevant tool available to the United Nations in the prevention and detection of situations that could degenerate into conflict or give rise to mass atrocities.

Lastly, we pay tribute to the important role that national and international civil society can play in support of the promotion and implementation of the

responsibility to protect. Effective prevention requires the active participation of civil society, the private sector, religious leaders and individuals. In that regard, my delegation would like to recall the Fez Process, the first Forum on the Role of Religious Leaders in Preventing Incitement that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes, which was held in Fez on 24 and 25 April 2015 and was devoted to engaging with religious leaders and spiritual actors to develop strategies to prevent incitement that can lead to atrocity crimes.

The Kingdom of Morocco shares the Secretary-General's firm conviction that the responsibility to protect can be attained only by consolidating democracy and the rule of law, as well as by implementing the provisions of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Morocco supports the Secretary-General in all his efforts to promote the concept of the responsibility to protect.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.